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ABSTRACT

Because of their egocentricity, many students have a limited sense of other cultures and are caught up in a web of ethnocentric biases without quite knowing how and why these biases exist. A framework, encompassing the theories of J. Moffett and J. Piaget, may be designed to move students through a series of hierarchical writing exercises that would enable students to identify their own point of view, to become familiar with other perspectives, and to move toward a larger field of knowledge, that of cultural awareness. Writing heuristics for such a framework can be designed with an anthropological base. The first heuristic would allow the students to explore their own ideas of concepts and those of others by discussing "culturally loaded" words, while a second group of heuristics would include three paragraphs excerpted from various readings in anthropology that deal with perspective. In this way students could examine various levels of experience and self orientation as expressed in those writings. The last heuristic would be an ethnographic paradigm designed to enable students to observe and record a situation as objectively as possible. The intent would be to limit the degree of subjectivity in observations leading to assessments of situations and cultures. Appended are suggested writing exercises for the first two heuristics and a sample participant/observation data sheet.) (HOD)

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STRATEGIES FOR EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE THROUGH THE WRITING PROCESS

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Teresa M. Castaldi
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An idea, like a seed, is planted in the human mind. Only with the proper nurturing will it ever bear fruit and blossom forth. My idea developed, budded, flourished and finally bore fruit with the assistance of a great many people who I would like to take the opportunity to thank.

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Once my seed was planted, the ground it fell upon proved to be fertile. I must thank Elaine Maimon for the quality experience she and her staff provided for the NEH participants. She and her staff displayed good humor, intelligence, enthusiasm and caring which nurtured my idea. This truly was one of the most rewarding academic experiences of my life.

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In my experiences as a teacher, I have found it to be very difficult for most students to move from an ego centered model of reality to a more expansive world view. Most students, to a large extent, are in touch with themselves, their peer groups and perhaps the characters on their favorite soap operas, but cannot, to use an old expression, walk in someone else's shoes. On a higher level, students, as well as many people in the general population, have a limited sense of other cultures and are caught up in a web of ethnocentric biases without quite knowing how and why these biases exist. Within both my writing and anthropology classes, it has been my intent to move students from their self-oriented base of awareness to alternate perceptions of reality, or, essentially, to budge them from what I term "blissful oblivion." As James Moffett has indicated, as an individual moves away from ego-centrism, he also moves towards abstraction. He has pointed out in his book Teaching the Universe of Discourse that this ego-centricity contributes to limiting abstract thought and thereby creates ineffectual models of the world and oneself. Thus, according to Moffett, the decreasing of self-centered behavior has a dual affect upon the individual: the assimilation of alternative ways of thinking as one decenters from ego and the development of the necessary skill of abstract thinking. Several means are suggested by Moffett to move a student towards this goal. He strongly recommends that a curriculum should closely parallel the developmental stages employed in the field of child psychology especially those posited by the developmental psychologists Jean Piaget and John

Flavell. Moffett also states that established within an instructor's hierarchy of skills should be tasks based on peer collaboration.

Last year, in both my writing and social science classes, I was quite proud of the work my students accomplished. However, I realize now, after this institute, that there were many holes in my writing curriculum and I was very lucky indeed to receive the quality work that my students produced. My intent here is to use the writing process which is essentially a thinking process as the foundation of my course. This process will be developed in a sequential manner as directed by Moffettand will be incorporated into a Piagetian scheme. The framework I have designed is devised to move students through a series of hierarchal writing exercises which I term a "continuum of awareness." This continuum will enable students to identify their own private point of view as well as familiarizing them with other perspectives and finally, move them towards a larger field of knowledge, that of cultural awareness. I have designed writing heuristics with an anthropological base. However, I believe the general structure of each exercise could be easily applied to other disciplines concerned with self exploration and external observation. Analagous to the notion of external observation and outward growth is the concept of culture on which I base my heuristic framework.

A recent definition of culture is the standards of behavior which one must know in order to operate within a particular social group. Culture, therefore, can be regarded as an abstraction or

composite generalization for the ideas in people's heads. Moreover, just as no two people possess the same idiolect in language, no two people within the same social group possess the same version of the cultural code (Goodenough, 1970).

Although this cognitive definition is ego centered, implicit within it are the shared meanings and interactions with others which are necessary as basic means of survival within a group. Therefore, there is an inherent movement from egocentricity to a larger, more encompassing world view that is necessary to co-exist harmoniously within a society. This does not imply that one forsakes one's basic self knowledge structure for the sake of the group; but, on the contrary, one builds upon it while still keeping the local point of view at center base.

Piaget and Flavell's studies of child development conclude that an individual achieves this more encompassing view through a series of four component processes. These processes rely upon external observation and role taking and are, in my opinion, very similar to the notion of an individual as a cultural entity as previously discussed. By progressing through these four stages, an individual is first, able to identify self; second, identify and recognize an audience; third, maintain audience identification over a period of time, and finally, adapt a message to suit audience requirements. Only with this recognition of others will an individual achieve any form of communicative competency including the invention and transmission of symbols to the learning of roles and behavior patterns within society. The writing process as a

cognitive activity is an important step towards accomplishing this goal.

Piaget and Flavell's four component processes are:

(1) existence or the initial awareness of self and different points of view;

(2) need or the recognition that a particular situation calls for role taking;

(3) inference, or the discovery of another's cognitive activity and the maintenance of that discovery over a period of time;

(4) application, or the knowledge of how to use inference and role taking in particular communication situations (Flavell, 1975).

My first writing heuristic (Appendix A) allows the student to explore his own ideas of concepts and those of others, and therefore, sequentially follows the first three of Piaget's and Flavells component processes. In following Moffett's directive to use collaborative learning, I am attempting to accomplish this through an exercise based on a Kenneth Bruffee design. It seemed appropriate to begin this exercise by having students' identify an inner perspective and then branch outward. I have chosen what I call "culturally loaded" words for this heuristic or words which I feel will generate discussion and differences of opinion.

Alternate ways of using this exercise include:

(1) It could be used both before and after a class unit on a specific country and culture or a unit on a particular period in history to determine if preconceived notions changed after instruction.

(2) Students could make up their own "loaded words" or words in common usage that have both connotative and denotative meanings.

(3) Temporal change in language could be examined by gathering words from different time periods which have similar dictionary meanings but have come to have different connotations through time. An example could be words such as bum, vagabond, urchin, tramp, vagrant, hobo, bag lady, ragamuffin, vagrant, panhandler, etc. Are these words all recognizable to the average student? Do they all mean the same?

My second group of heuristics (Appendix B) presents three paragraphs exerpted from various readings in anthropology which deal with perspective. I am using this type of a paragraph for multiple reasons. First, I am interested in exposing students to anthropological literature. In addition, I am concerned with having students examine various levels of experience and self orientation as expressed in these writings. I would also like them to be able to identify the various writing modes and aims within the paragraphs as well as being able to understand the distinction between reader-based and writer-based prose. As a follow up exercise, I would like them to write their own paragraphs using similar structures. These particular paragraphs and exercises will take a student through all four of Piaget's and Flavell's cognitive processes: existence, need, inference and application.

Other possible exercises which could be generated from these writings include:

(1) The writing about the similarities and differences amongst people across time and space (paragraph 1).

(2) Discussion and writing exercises could be generated from the inferences made in both paragraph two and three. For example, what does Chagnon infer about Indians? or according to Deloria, what do anthropologists infer about Indians?

(3) The notion of exploitation, especially from paragraphs two and three could generate writing assignments. How does one use knowledge to exploit? How is a particular group exploited by another?

My last heuristic (Appendix C) in this continuum of awareness is an ethnographic paradigm designed to enable students to observe and record a situation as objectively as possible. It is based upon the whole notion of an ethnography or what is known as a description of a culture which is a primary means of data collecting used in the field of anthropology. The particular form of ethnographic methodology I am using here is the method of participant-observation where the observer, in a sense, also becomes part of the action. Two things inspired me to construct this model. The first was the repeated mention of the "Mama Rat" project here at Beaver and how students could not remove subjectivity from data collecting. Also, memories of my students who had difficulties separating themselves from the information they collected for short term enthnographies sparked me into action. I am reminded of one student in particular who went through a multitude of drafts with his paper and who was never able to maintain any sense of objectivity over his subject. Eric was interviewing a newly arrived immigrant who

worked as a dishwasher in the same restaurant as he did. Words like sneaky, creep, hostile, moron, etc. would always find their way into his paper without any substantial information to back these statements up. Finally, for the last paper, Eric handed in two versions: one had a fairly objective summary while the other paper had a summary which read like an editorial.

This exercise will encompass all four of Piaget's and Flavell's four processes with a twofold goal. One of the students would write a purely descriptive piece on their observations. Secondly, the students after writing this descriptive piece could then write an objective account of their observations. Thus, the intent would be to limit the degree of subjectivity in observations leading to assessments of situations and cultures. This heuristic could also lead into a writing project of a larger scope and would be an excellent preliminary device prior to having a student do an ethnography for any extended period of time.

In concluding this presentation, I would like to leave you with several thoughts. First, I would again like to stress the need for content in writing courses. Content cannot be divorced from the writing process and contributes to the students' knowledge base as well as fostering abstract thinking. In my particular framework, theories in anthropology are brought forth to the students via writing assignments. Also, the use of sequential stages in heuristics is important if one intends to move students towards a larger scheme of reality. The strategies I have presented are not discipline specific and can be used in a variety of

disciplines running the gamut from psychology, sociology, history and Theories of Economic Development to courses in Literary Analysis, Journalism and composition classes. I would particularly like to emphasize their use in composition classes. The incoming college freshman who wears his "nuke Iran" tee shirt while carrying his can of Dr. Pepper into class who believes that all Indians are called "Kemosabe" and live in teepees in the southwest, needs to have his consciousness raised." A student must learn values as well as how to differentiate judgments that serve an egocentric or ethnocentric bias from judgments that have an adequate empirical base. A curriculum which stresses reading, the writing process and collaborative learning appears to offer an answer to this problem.

Secondly, the primary discussion of growth seems to be a movement from the center of self outward. Piaget has stated, however, that egocentricism is basically centrism. Thus, as a person moves away from that center core the path of movement always takes him right back to where he started and feeds into the core of self. It is hoped, however, that the knowledge newly acquired along this circular path is incorporated into the individual's cognitive structure. It is the educator's responsibility to strew this circular path with as much information and as many learning exercises as possible, thereby helping to cultivate an original mind capable of abstraction rather than one steeped in stereotype and limited by the mundane.

Finally, I will leave you with a question frequently posed in the field of anthropology. "Can another person actually think like someone else?" Or to use anthropological jargon: "Can

you get inside the native's head?" Anthropology has borrowed two terms from the linguist Kenneth Pike to help explain this issue. These terms are "emics" and "etics" derived from the linguistic terms phonemics and phonetics, respectively. Etics denotes all the possible universals of any particular concept or the grab bag of all possibilities of an idea known to mankind. Emics is defined as the concept which is solely in the individual's mind or the particular group of concepts one draws from the kit of etic universals. Is it possible for anyone to provide an emic description of a concept or know totally the cognitive structure of another? This argument is still waged amongst many prominent anthropologists and I, therefore, do not feel qualified to answer it. I can, however, hazard a guess and say that I think not. I do strongly believe, however, that an awareness of the similarities and differences within other individuals and other cultures can be achieved through a movement from the self outward. The writing process is a natural way to help students achieve this goal.
A signal, whether written, verbal or non-verbal, from one individual to another is always masked by that individual's particular culture. We certainly cannot totally remove that mask. However, a curriculum strongly based upon writing can use the writing process as a thinking process to make the student aware of the existence of this mask, his own as well as others, and most importantly, provide him with the tools necessary to look behind it.

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Appendix A

A CONTINUUM OF AWARENESS

Collaborative Learning Exercise: "Culturally" Loaded Words

Instructions:

After introducing yourselves to each other, agree on one person to record the views expressed by the group and any decisions and the group makes collectively. The recorder will speak for the group.

1. One person who is not the recorder will read each word (concept) aloud.
2. Spend 2 to 3 minutes jotting down the first impressions that come to your mind on the index cards provided after hearing a word read.
3. Discuss your impression of the word with the group.
4. Discuss what you think the same word would mean to your family.
5. Discuss what you think the same word would mean to the average American.
6. Discuss what you think the same word would mean to someone from another culture.
7. Contrast your initial impressions of the word with your opinions after discussing it with the rest of the group.
8. After discussing your initial impressions, have any of the ideas/arguments presented caused you to change or modify your definition of the word in question?

Writing Assignment

Write a paragraph on your original perception of one of the words/concepts discussed and how new insights through collaborative learning caused you to change or remain the same.

Sample "Culturally" Loaded Words:

sexism	communism
marriage	abortion
poverty	nationalism
Iran	energy
racism	feminism

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Appendix B

A CONTINUUM OF AWARENESS

I. An Insider Looking In

"...When you are a child, you play at nothing things. You build little huts and play. Then you come back to the village and continue to play..If people bother you, you get up and play elsewhere.

Once we left a pool of rain water where we had been playing and went to the little huts we had made. We stayed there and played at being hunters. We went out tracking animals and when we saw one, we struck it with make-believe arrows.

We made believe about everything. We made believe we cooked food and then we took it out of the fire. We had a trance dance, and we sang and danced and danced and sang and the boys made believe they were curing us.

One day when I was fairly big, I went with some of my friends and with my younger brother and sister away from the village into the bushes. As we were walking, I saw the tracks of a baby kudu in the sand. I called to everyone and showed them. As we followed the tracks around, we saw in the shade of a tree, the little kudu dead asleep. I jumped and tried to grab it. I hadn't really caught it well. We started following the new tracks. I ran ahead of everyone. I came on it, jumped on it and then killed it. I grabbed its legs and carried it back. When I came to where the rest of them were, my older cousin said to me 'My cousin, my little cousin killed a kudu! The rest of you here, what are you doing? How come the men didn't kill the kudu? This young girl has so much run in her that she killed the kudu'..."

From Shostak, Marjorie, "A!Kung Woman's Memories of Childhood" in Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers edited by R. Lee and I. DeVore, Harvard University Press, 1976.

Suggested Writing Exercises

A. Write a paragraph with yourself as the insider, e.g. yourself within your family (now or in the past), your peer group or another particular environment that you have been comfortable in.

B. Write about the similarities and differences amongst people across space and time.

C. Discuss the notion of self as expressed by The!.Kung Woman. Compare it to your own.

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Appendix B

A CONTINUUM OF AWARENESS

II. An Outsider Looking In

"...We arrived at the village and docked the boat along the muddy bank at the terminus of the path used by the Indians to fetch their drinking water. It was hot and muggy and my clothing was soaked with perspiration. The small, biting gnats were out in astronomical numbers, for it was the beginning of the dry season. My face and hands were swollen from the venom of their numerous stings. In just a few moments, I was to meet my first Yanomamo, my first primitive man. What would it be like? I had visions of entering the village and seeing 125 social facts running about calling each other kinship terms and sharing food, each waiting and anxious to have me collect his genealogy. I would wear them out in turn. Would they like me? This was important to me; I wanted them to be so fond of me that they would adopt me into their kinship system and way of life, because I had heard that successful anthropologists always get adopted by their people.

My heart began to pound as we approached the village and heard the buzz of activity within the compound. The entrance to the village was covered with brush and dry palm leaves. We pushed them aside to expose the low opening to the village. The excitement of meeting my first Indians was almost unbearable as I duck-waddled through the low passage into the village clearing. I looked up and gasped when I saw a dozen burly, naked, filthy, hideous men staring at us down the shafts of their drawn arrows! Immense wads of green tobacco were stuck between their lower teeth and lips making them look even more hideous, and strands of dark green slime dripped or hung from their noses. My next discovery was that there were a dozen or so vicious, underfed dogs snapping at my legs, circling me as if I were going to be their next meal. I just stood there helpless and pathetic. What sort of welcome was this for the person who came here to live with you and learn your way of life, to become friends with you?..."

from Chagnon, Napoleon, The Yanomamo: The Fierce People

Suggested Writing Exercises:

a) In a paragraph, react to a situation where you were the outsider. For example, you could write about your experiences during the first few weeks of your freshman year of college when you were the outsider discovering new situations. Or you could react to a scene on a bus, a discussion among friends when you were just observing or your impressions of a different country or part of the United States.

b) What does Chagnon infer about Indians?

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Appendix B

A CONTINUUM OF AWARENESS

III. An Insider's Response to an Outsider's Perception

"...Into each life, it is said, some rain must fall. Some people have bad horoscopes, others take tips on the stock market. Indians have anthropologists.

Every summer shen school is out a veritable stream of immigrants heads into Indian contry. From every rock and cranny in the East they emerge, as if responding to some primeval fertility rite, and flock to the reservations. They are the anthropologists. They are the most prominent members of the scholarly community that infests the land of the free, and in the summer time, the home of the brave.

Each summer there is a new battle cry, which inspires new insights into the nature of the 'Indian problem.' One summer Indians will be greeted with the joyful cry of 'Indians are bilingual!' The following summer this great truth will be expanded to 'Indians are not only bilingual, they are bicultural!' Biculturality creates great problems for the opposing anthropological camp. So the opposing school of thought cry 'Indians are a folk people!' Thus go the anthropological wars, testing whether this school or that school can endure longest. And the battlefields, unfortunately are the lives of Indian people.

You may be curious as to why the anthropologist never carries a writing instrument. He never makes a mark because he already knows what he is going to find. He need not record anything except his daily expenses for audit, for he has found his answer in the books he read the winter before. No, the anthropologist is only out to verify what he has suspected all along--Indians are a very quaint people who bear watching.

The fundamental thesis of the anthropologist is that people are objects for observation; people are then considered objects for experimentation, for manipulation and eventual extinction. The anthropologist furnishes the justification for treating Indian people like so many chessman available for anyone to play with. The amssive volume of useless knowledge produced by anthropologists attempting to capture the real Indians in a network of theories has contributed substantially to the invisibility of the Indian today. Indian people begin to feel that they are merely shadows of a mythical super-Indian. Many anthropologists spare no expense to reinforce this sense of inadequacy in order to further support their influence over Indian people. Over the years, anthropologists have succeeded in burying Indian communities so completely beneath the mass of irrelevant information that the total impact of the scholarly community on Indian people has become one of simple authority..."

from Deloria, Vine, Custer Died for Your Sins, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1969.

Appendix B

Suggested Writing Exercises:

a) Respond in a paragraph to someone or something which has recently evaluated you. This could be a reaction to a teacher or employer's evaluation of your performance, a friend or relative's response to you, or your reaction to a newspaper article, editorial or a book focusing on your ethnic background, race, religion, area of residence or any belief you adhere to. Your paper should first address what you think their perceptions are of you and then focus on a response.

b) According to Deloria, what do anthropologists infer about Indians?

c) How does one use knowledge to exploit? How is a particular group exploited by another?

Appendix C

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PARTICIPANT/OBSERVATION

DATA SHEET

Observer:

Activity:

Date/Time:

Location/Setting:

Participants:

Participant	Dialogue/Action	Personal Comments

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